

# Christianity and Crisis

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## Thy Peace, O Christ, and Not Another's

**W**HAT IS PEACE? Advent time, and the disturbed character of the times force the question upon us.

Peace is not the absence of perturbation, whether in the soul of man or in human society. But if it is not that, what is it? Peace is the presence in life of a divine concern; it is commitment to God and his Kingdom. This is the peace which Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, called "my peace." It is the peace which he bequeathed to his disciples as his most precious legacy. "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you," he said to them the night before his crucifixion. "Not as the world giveth give I unto you." The peace of the world and the peace of Christ confront one another in perpetual contrast and conflict.

Peace as mere freedom from anxiety and care, or as a luxurious sense of security, is the peace of the world. It is a peace which flows from adjustment to the prevailing situation in one's time. Or it may be a peace which comes from the mastery of potent forces. These forces can impose quiet order in the outer world or induce a dead stillness in the inner world of the spirit.

The Tempter tried to prevail upon Jesus to conquer the world by accommodating himself to the realities of human relationship in the world. By so doing, he would assume universal lordship without becoming the Crucified who would reign from a Cross. Epicurus instilled into his followers an "unruffled imperturbability" which either ignored, or was quite insensitive to, the sordid realities of life around them. When a Spanish peasant was asked regarding his religious beliefs, he replied, "I believe what the Church believes." And when asked what the Church believed, his reply was, "The Church believes what I believe." In that perfect cycle of blissful ignorance and indifference he spent his peaceful days.

In these times a planned economy can solve the problem of poverty, as in England; but it does so only by giving rise to a new restlessness and unsatisfied longing, posing new problems for Christian sociology. Fascist and Communist rulers may suppress opposition and call their triumph peace, creating the peace which is found in cemeteries. A rigid ecclesiasticism which confuses church programs with constitutional prin-

ples or a churchly conformism which identifies an ingeniously contrived majority vote with the clear guidance of the Holy Spirit, projects into the religious realm the peace of the world. The peace of the world soon becomes the peace of the graveyard where impressive order and quiet beauty reign in the midst of death. There the dead are peacefully secure, and the living admire the trappings which adorn the tombs of those at rest.

In cases where the problem of unrest cannot be solved by State or Church, recourse is had to "a strategy of solace" which induces peace of mind by some psychological device. This may be so-called "positive" thinking, or the "intellectual love of God;" or it may be enthronement of the aesthetic judgment as the ultimate criterion of what is real. In all these instances, the human self is either coerced into conformity or drugged into unreality. In no instance is he allowed to abandon himself in high adventure to God's redemptive purposes for himself and for the world.

True peace, however, does not flow from adjustment to an historical situation or to psychological forces. It has its source and stay in adjustment to God. It is born when the tension caused by a sense of estrangement from God comes to an end. It is the peace which flows from a sense of God's forgiveness, which makes it easy and natural to say to God, "my Father." In classical, theological terms this is "justification by faith," and the deep inner peace which follows. This is the "peace of God which passes all understanding," which "garrisons" the heart, which prepares one for tomorrow with the assurance that "as thy days, so shall thy strength be," and that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

But this peace does not spell detachment from the realities of the temporal order and the sovereign purpose of God. It is a dynamic peace. It braces the Christian man who has given himself with joyous abandon to God as his willing captive to face life in its wholeness. "Seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness," he knows that whatever happens to him will happen for his good. He knows also what an early Israelite came to know, that "the stars in their courses fight against Sisera." He knows that

everything which is contrary to God and his Kingdom shall be overcome. This gives him peace. The symbol of this peace is not the quiet depths of the vast ocean which lie beneath the tumultuous waves that rock the surface of the waters. It is rather the river, the river whose waters have found their channel, that is the true symbol of Christian peace. The river is as much at peace in the roaring cataract as when it flows through the placid meadow; its peace is as real in the sunless cavern as when sunlight bathes the flowing stream. It is at peace, because its bed is made. So, too, with those who are committed with unreserved abandon to God and his will.

This is the peace of Christ. It is the peace which he himself had, and the peace which he gives. It was that deep abysmal calm which made it possible for him to sweat blood in Gethsemane and to accept with serenity his Father's will once it had become clear to him that obedience must needs lead him to the Cross. Had it not been for that deep peace of perfect union with the will of God, Christ's selfhood would have been rifted asunder; but his basic commitment made agony possible, as it made the worst acceptable once the worst became known.

That great Spaniard, Miguel de Unamuno, has made a contribution to the understanding of Christian peace which our generation sorely needs. Re-echoing the words of Pascal that "Jesus Christ will be in agony until the end of the world," he stressed the fact that the true peace of God, the peace which Christ had and which he gives to his followers, expresses itself in endless struggle for the Kingdom of God. He wrote in his greatest poem, *The Christ of Velazquez*, "Only by struggling for Heaven, O Christ, can we mortals live the reality of peace."

Perfect love, as Kierkegaard suggested a century ago, is perfect sorrow, for it stirs agonizing concern for people in need. So, too, perfect peace, which is union with the redemptive will of God, is fulfilled only in action. It is a peace which expresses itself in a holy warfare. Its symbolic weapons, in the language of Christ himself, are "fire" and a "sword." "Tongues of fire" are the emblems of its utterance, tongues whose words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, not merely enlighten but inflame. This is creative war, war for peace, war that is made possible by the reality of deep inward calm. The ardor in which it finds expression is maintained by draughts from the "river of God which is full of water."

This is sheer fanaticism, I hear one say. Not necessarily, though it can run the danger of becoming fanaticism unless the ardent spirits are subject to the Word, the Spirit and the Community of Christ. But today, alas, it is not the heat of ardor but cold, complacent order that is the real problem in most religious circles.

The peril of this view of peace is, of course, that struggle may be glorified for its own sake, almost as an end in itself. This is the peril to which Unamuno actually succumbed when he proclaimed the essence of true religion to be struggle with God. What the great Basque, true child of his race, nurtured in a pre-Reformation form of the Christian religion, never came to understand was this. The real basis and starting point of the peace of Christ, of union with Christ's redemptive warfare, is a sense of reconciliation with God, of justification by God, the holy peace of God. But thereafter the struggle is renewed, though in transfigured form. Inspired and maintained by that peace, Christ's follower wars to the death, with an abiding sense of mission, that God's Kingdom may come, "and until the day shall break, and the shadows flee away."

Grant us, O Christ, Thy peace, this Christmastide.

JOHN MACKAY

#### EDITORIAL NOTES

We are publishing in this issue the very perceptive account of the heresy trials conducted against three young pastors of the Northwest Synod of the United Lutheran Church. This article by Clarence Kilde, a Congregational minister who followed the trials very closely, may well give pause to all members of Christian churches who find themselves in agreement with the essential position of the three young defendants, and who will regret that the old fundamentalist controversy has now invaded the Lutheran church, hitherto happily free of such efforts to insist upon a literalistic orthodoxy. The only hopeful development in this affair is the fact that at least one of the three pastors was supported by his congregation. We were privately assured that the accusers of the young pastors were far from being literalists in their position, but the charges they made prove the strictly fundamentalist type of their orthodoxy.

With the failure of the second Geneva conference it is time that the Western world assess the present realities of its engagement with communism. The picture is so dark that one only hopes it will not plunge our nation into another period of hysteria, for we have only recently been emancipated from a previous hysteria, which clouded the judgment of the nation. It now is apparent that we were redeemed by a mirage, created by the Summit meeting at Geneva of the heads of state. The summit meeting produced the valuable results of prompting each side to confess that it did not believe that the other side intended to start a war in an atomic age. Indeed it may have also persuaded each side that it must not start such a war. It also served the good purposes of discrediting the

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# Heresy in Milwaukee: An Interpretation

CLARENCE KILDE

MILWAUKEE MEANS many things to many people. Boasts a citizen as regards the cultural heresy, "The three B's of Milwaukee are not Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms; but beer, baseball, and bowling." The political heresy is obvious in the fact that Wisconsin, in the Republican column, must ever tolerate its major city usually electing a Socialist mayor. The sociological paradox is seen in the fact that Milwaukee, less than 2 hours from Chicago, has had a local crime rate the lowest of any major city in the United States. Again, chock full of provincialism and parochialism, the city reads *The Milwaukee Journal* (which has been rated in the top ten of the U.S.) that is as fearless and fair in any controversy as to be usually respected but rarely loved. And Milwaukee, perhaps the most Lutheran city in the nation, has now added theological heresy to the record. Militant colleagues in the ministry have for many months been hounding three young Lutheran clergymen, which chase began with charges of darkly suspecting them of denying the virgin birth of Christ.

American Protestantism is never very profound in its heresy charges. Characterized by an unawareness of the historic heresy charges in classic Christian history, American Protestants usually fix on the virgin birth. Freudians may have their own explanation of this. But obviously, what is more popular than the Christmas story? Non-theological Americans in a secular age can be counted on to know at least the Christmas story. Hence this particular charge of heresy arouses the quickest popular reactions; rapport is immediate. Press and pulpitiess have a field day and publicity is assured. From June through November more than fifty stories and accounts appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal* alone.

One need not have too long a memory to recall the heresy charges against Harry Emerson Fosdick in the mid-twenties. In newspapers and advertised sermon titles the dogma of the virgin birth held the focal center of attention. That controversy, which thundered in Baptist and Presbyterian circles, reverberated for years in a variety of Protestant denominations. Belatedly this heresy charge has kicked up a storm among midwest Lutherans with the suddenness of a midwest tornado. One aspect of this surprise is that the heresy charge arose among ministers of the United Lutheran Church (ULC), considered liberal among Lutherans.

Now that the virgin birth is neither a great historical doctrine, nor by itself profound theology ought to be quite evident in reviewing a few basic observations. Chronologically the oldest gospel, that of Mark, does not mention the idea. The oldest manuscript of the Gospel according to Matthew, the Syriac, concludes the genealogical table thus, "And Joseph begat Jesus." The two greatest interpreters of Jesus in the New Testa-

ment are the author of the Fourth Gospel, and he who wrote more than one-half of the New Testament, Paul the Apostle. To both we owe the profound, classic doctrine of the Incarnation, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14); and again, "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Galatians 4:4). The Incarnation, yes, but for these two writers, responsible for giving us most of the New Testament, the virgin birth was not dignified enough to mention. For virgin birth was a contemporary, popular thought pattern explaining the unusual greatness of such men as Pythagoras, Plato, Augustus Caesar.

To accept on faith the doctrine of the Incarnation is classic, historic, biblical Christianity; to insist on virgin birth as historical proof or factual description of how the Incarnation took place is a recent emphasis made popular especially during this past century in the rise of Biblical Fundamentalism in America.

To be sure, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation there came a popular clamor for a fixed, central authority. Whereas the state could appeal to the authority of the divine right of kings, and the Roman Catholic Church could appeal to the infallible authority of the Pope, it became an easy step for Protestants to enshrine the Bible, word for word, as their infallible authority. But it was not until the rise of the scientific spirit in America in the 19th century that Biblical Fundamentalism came into its own. It is this Fundamentalist premise on which the dogma of the virgin birth rests. For if one must take at face value every word of the Bible, then it matters not that the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles of Paul do not mention the concept because it is sufficient that Luke, the poetic artist with words, so speaks in the Christmas story.

Actually then the initial charge of heresy being disbelief in the virgin birth is illustrative or symptomatic of an apparently more serious charge, namely, the denial of the scriptures as the verbally inspired Word of God. But it is only apparently more serious. The infallibility of the Bible is likewise neither a profound doctrine nor a widely accepted historical, theological tenet. It can be said without serious refutation that there is no single classic formula of interpreting the scriptures phrased in a succinct doctrine. There is no doctrine of the Bible as such in the great historic creeds of the church. Origen, St. Augustine, Martin Luther — all alike interpreted scripture selectively, now literally, again morally, and yet again allegorically.

Precisely here lies the primary pathos of the heresy trials in Milwaukee, in that the ministers George Crist, John Gerberding, and Victor Wrigley, each charged with the guilt of "doctrinal deviation," were in fact not deviating from the truly classic doctrines of the historic church but rather departing from secondary

denominational dogmas no longer tenable among most Protestant theologians of any stature and standing today. To illustrate this point it is well to recall that the Reverend John Gerberding during his trial was willing to sign a statement placing his faith in the Nicene Creed, Luther's small catechism, and the synod's constitution, "because he had always stood on these foundations."<sup>1</sup> He explained to the trial committee that he accepted the "canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and only infallible rule of faith and practice." He confessed his agreement with the ULC in their denominational declaration, "We accept the Scriptures as the infallible truth of God in all matters that pertain to His revelation and our salvation." Gerberding declared the critical words in that passage as being "in all matters that pertain to His revelation and our salvation," (not necessarily in scientific or historical matters).

"Since the days of the Reformation," Gerberding continued, "this position permits a freedom in the preaching and teaching ministry that is not bound to the letter but that is completely bound and enslaved to that Living Word who is Jesus Christ."

The trial committee found in the defendant's position "obvious confusion, immaturity and inconsistencies." But if a Lutheran minister is to be charged with inconsistencies in this matter it is because Martin Luther was himself inconsistent. As any serious student of Martin Luther is aware, Luther was ambiguous in his use of the term "the Word of God." By that term Luther sometimes meant the Bible, the book as such; again in the use of this phrase he was speaking of Jesus Christ; and yet again "the Word of God" is the sermon, the preaching of the "Biblical message."

This, then, is the primary pathetic aspect of these heresy trials, that the basic charge common to all three, that of denying the authority of the literal interpretation of the Bible, is in fact charging them with the denial of a doctrine of the Bible which has no creedal standing in historic Christianity and about which there has always been some ambiguity, not the least in Luther himself.

And there are other pathetic aspects to this heresy business. A Jewish friend of mine asked, "Where are we, back in the Middle Ages again?" For the general public heresy is a word with a particularly medieval flavor, especially when the meetings of the five-man investigating committee, (the personnel of which never changed except in the case of one due to illness,) and the trial committee of seven men, in all three cases met in secret sessions, without permitting the presence of the press, or laymen of the churches involved, or other ministers, or anyone interested or concerned. Furthermore, the oft repeated phrase, "doctrinal deviation" unfortunately smacked of theoretical Marxists bearing down on some ambiguous

fine points of ideological arguments to ease out of the Party unwanted members. One has an unholy suspicion that the real heresy of these three suspended ministers was that they were not tending to their knitting. They were all alike, ministers of mission churches in the sprawling, rapidly growing suburbs of Milwaukee, and the nearby commuting community of Menomonee Falls. Crist, Gerberding, and Wrigley should have been more concerned with building financial and membership statistics. After all, a sister synod of the Midwest, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, has reported establishing a new parish every 18 days. The competitive spirit of our secular society has invaded most churches feverishly engaged in the biggest church building boom in American history. This is no time for ministers to have a concern for intellectual honesty, one must not upset the ecclesiastical applecart. Go ahead and repeat the Apostles' Creed but be sure to be oblivious to people's inarticulate disturbance over the meaning of the creed. At denominational headquarters it is statistics that are important, not spiritual sincerity or theological integrity. Hence, it is ecclesiastically expedient for ministers to be silent about some things or talk with tongue in cheek. In other words, more is on trial here than these three young men.

Fortunately for the spiritual life of the church the young and dedicated still find it hard to be merely expedient. In June of this year the public became aware of the impending heresy trials by the customary headline "Pastor Does Not Believe in Virgin Birth of Christ." This was the account of a special meeting of the congregation of Gethsemane Lutheran Church at which their minister, the Reverend Victor Wrigley, advised his parish of the fact he was under an impending investigation by members of the synod. He spoke of "very dear friends" also under investigation, the Reverend George Crist Jr. of Bethlehem Lutheran Church and the Reverend John Gerberding of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Menomonee Falls. Pastor Wrigley went on to give his frank explanation of why he does not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Here evidently was the first and common charge leveled at all three ministers soon to be tried for heresy.

First to be declared guilty, July 28, and suspended from the ministry on August 2 by Dr. Paul E. Bishop, Minneapolis, head of the Northwest Synod, ULC, was the Reverend George C. Crist, aged 31, with wife and three children. He had been minister for six years of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, a mission parish of some 225 members. The trial jury reached a verdict of guilty after three hours of deliberation following about ten hours of theological debate around the 50 page brief submitted by Pastor Crist.

The minister declared guilty said he was not surprised at the verdict. "I have stated that it is my opinion that Jesus was not born of a virgin and that a man is not a Christian either by virtue of his be-

<sup>1</sup>All quotations dealing with the trial are from the The Milwaukee Journal.

lieving or disbelieving such a claim," Pastor Crist said. He disclaimed any interpretation of himself as a crusader and so had not criticized the synod theologically but claimed he had at times criticized the synod because it "over-emphasized" money and the material aspects of church life. His answer to the verdict of guilty was that he considers himself still a Lutheran.

On August 24 in a secret ballot members of Bethlehem Church approved the suspension of their pastor, 62-15. It was obvious in the discussion that the local parish had little alternative, being a mission parish and financially dependent upon the synod. In addition was the evident fact that Pastor Crist had a leaning towards scholarly interests which often is an embarrassment to the laity. Crist is not the first minister more tempted by his study than strolling the streets ringing doorbells on social calls. And yet again the trial committee had gone beyond the announced specific charges to drag out of Crist doubts about intercessory prayer. This, more than theology, upsets laymen. So the parish rather enthusiastically let him go.

Meanwhile the synod's executive committee offered to give Crist \$500 severance pay on condition he vacate the parsonage with wife and children by October 1. Since that time he has enrolled as a graduate student in philosophy at Iowa City with a \$450 scholarship. That there have been financial worries and difficulties is understandable as Crist seeks part-time work to care for his family. By mid-October he surrendered to synodical headquarters his ordination papers. The motivation of this last act was undoubtedly encouraged by the action of the synod in the case of John Gerberding. For this was a case of another color.

The trial jury which opened on August 31 heard 11 hours of testimony and deliberated more than 5 hours before unanimously voting a verdict of acquittal of John Gerberding on all heresy charges. This ordeal packed emotions of another kind because Pastor Gerberding's grandfather, George H. Gerberding, was one of the founders of Northwestern Theological Seminary in Minneapolis. Pastor Gerberding's uncle, the Reverend Richard Gerberding, is a former president of the Northwest Synod, and now executive secretary of the Board of American Missions in the United States. The father of the accused minister is also a ULC minister, though not of the Northwest Synod. Though many of the charges were quite identical with those which convicted Crist, the jury finally felt, however, that the testimony during the trial was evidence of "irregular and disturbing doctrinal presentations." The committee therefore concluded, "Such behavior does not of itself constitute heresy yet it cannot be disregarded. Uncontrolled, such irresponsibility could eventually lead to actual heresy. We therefore unanimously recommend that proper administration action be taken by the synod to rectify this offensive situation."

And so the second heresy trial could only mean more

confusion both within and without the church. Commented the *Christian Century*, "As matters stand in Wisconsin the Lutherans now have one minister guilty and the other not guilty of heresy for believing the same thing. Perhaps the Wrigley trial, still on the docket, will break the tie."

But before the Wrigley trial the Gerberding case took a decisive turn. In his weekly parish bulletin Gerberding said he had not changed his mind, that as before he was accepting the Nicene Creed without saying that he recognized the actual, physical resurrection or visible ascension of Jesus Christ. So Gerberding still contended his teachings were not bound by the letter of the Bible. These remarks touched off a demand for a re-trial. By the following Tuesday, September 6, an informal gathering of 36 ULC ministers unanimously petitioned for a re-trial of Gerberding.

Now getting into the act was the Reverend William Downey, ULC minister in another Milwaukee suburb, (the Downey whose voice you hear on Edward R. Murrow's "I Can Hear It Now" recording, saying a prayer at Tinian as the bomber takes off with the first atom bomb which dropped on Hiroshima) a leading critic of the liberal views of the guilty Crist. He now became a moving spirit in the so-called "bull session" of 36 fellow ministers requesting re-trial of the acquitted Gerberding. However Downey, pastor in fashionable Fox Point suburb, likes to play both sides of the street. So later he told a meeting of the Wisconsin conference of the Northwest Synod, "Many in our church would agree that the creation story of Genesis is poetic or figurative—and they will not be persecuted for heresy for saying it;" his explanation, "it is a story pre-scientifically written which we are not bound to accept as scientific truth." He further declared Martin Luther did not believe in "an infallible and errorless Bible." Gerberding saw in such statements his own vindication. And a few days later Crist replied, "I invite Pastor Downey to read the transcript of my trial." Conservatives concerned with the new adverse publicity claimed Downey had been misunderstood. The Reverend Charles Burmeister of Marinette, who played the role of prosecutor at all three trials, pressed for comment on Downey now hedged, "I don't think he means to deny the authority of the Scriptures. I think that he is concerned with the way of interpreting it. I, myself, am not a literalist. To know when the Bible is to be taken literally and when it is to be taken figuratively is an art. When you don't know those principles, that is when you go astray."

No one, including Dr. Bishop, was sure a re-trial was constitutional. To placate the rump meeting of fellow ministers following Gerberding's acquittal and to pour oil on the troubled waters later stirred up by Downey, Dr. Bishop now asked Gerberding to quietly hand in his ordination papers. Gerberding did not follow this suggestion but by mid-October, wishing to spare his little congregation any more trouble, (a 2

year mission parish of 200 members worshipping in an American Legion Hall) he offered his resignation. On October 27 the congregation met to vote on the resignation and refused its acceptance by a vote of 55-40. Gerberding pointed out that 55 favorable to his cause was nevertheless only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the parish and in any case "I am still not at home in this synod." On Sunday, November 13, with Dr. Bishop present and advising the congregation to accept their minister's resignation, the secret ballot resulted in a 78-31 vote to comply with synodical pressure.

Meanwhile Pastor Gerberding, with wife and three children, was granted two weeks vacation with pay and the use of the parsonage until January 1. Until then the suspended minister will work on a weekly newspaper in Lancaster, Wisconsin.

By now tension must have been mounting in the synodical office at Minneapolis because the heresy hunt was already back-firing with a chain of explosive questions not contemplated. The Reverend Victor Wrigley of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in the suburb of Brookfield who early had taken his parish into his confidence, explaining his theology and the process of events at special meetings and in parish letters, was now enjoying the solid support of his parish. Wrigley, aged 35, had the advantage of having served 7 years as minister to this mission church of some 400 members, plus the stature of laymen on the church council who could keep the score card. They and the minister accused the synod officials of changing the rules during the game. They protested the unconstitutionality of the proceedings in that the investigating committee was not investigating but initiating charges. The minister had not been advised of the specific charges in advance of his presence at the committee hearing. And once the accused minister was present the investigating committee ranged beyond the customary charges. Furthermore, the committee did not permit the laymen of the church involved to be present. So the church council advised their minister not to attend further meetings and in mid-September the congregation voted 114-0 in approval of the council's action.

By mid-October Pastor Wrigley was notified he must stand trial. Eventually it was evident the charges would be substantially the same as those against Crist and Gerberding. Wrigley's answer was a flat refusal to attend the trial and he declared that if the synod was taking a strict, fundamentalist view in all its investigations and trials, "then I am guilty." He followed this with a warning; the synod officials could suspend him from the synod but could not force him out as pastor of Gethsemane Church. That decision rested with the parish.

Before the day of the trial Pastor Wrigley outlined carefully to his congregation the issues involved and his theological views. This was fully reported in the press, which together with other news clippings and published sermons became the basis of the trial evi-

dence on which Wrigley was unanimously declared guilty on November 10, with recommendation of suspension from the ministry. On November 16 there came the official notice of his suspension from Dr. Bishop. There remained the explosive question, what would the congregation of Gethsemane Church now do?

With this, as with the other two parishes, the big stick over their heads was missionary support. The congregation was now advised if it chose to keep Wrigley and leave the synod there would be presented a bill for unpaid indebtedness on the property and a bill for total salary aid covering 7 years. So the issues were now joined. To those unacquainted with ecclesiastical polity it must be explained that despite their rigid theology Lutherans have considerable congregational prerogatives in polity if laymen only choose to take advantage. At Gethsemane Church they chose so to do.

On Sunday evening, November 27, by secret ballot, the congregation voted 197-18 to retain their pastor. They further voted a petition to the synod that the entire investigation, trial, conviction, and suspension of the Reverend Victor Wrigley be submitted to the executive board of the ULC, the parent organization of the synod. To further clarify its position, the congregation authorized its officers to borrow up to \$48,000 and to execute notes on a mortgage of the church property for such a loan. This was a precautionary move in case the denominational missionary board made a move to foreclose on the church. This triple decision of the parish was in answer to the presence of Dr. Bishop, synodical head, who asked the congregation to approve the conviction of Wrigley.

Against what background can these heresy trials be interpreted? In all fairness to the ULC it must first be remembered that it is not so much a synod or denomination but a federation of some thirty synods, of which the Northwest Synod is very conservative, and even so this is the first heresy trial in their history.

Generally speaking, Lutheranism in the Midwest, whether German or Scandinavian is a diaspora culture. This is to say theology stopped developing with the immigrant fathers of the church in the Mississippi Valley. The heavy mid-nineteenth century immigration from Germany and Scandinavian countries coincided with the rise of Biblical Fundamentalism in American Protestantism as a norm of faith in a day of developing scientific spirit and "higher criticism." In contrast, Lutheranism in the homelands of Europe kept pace with theological development. There, orthodoxy in theology did not rest on the infallibility of every word of the Bible. In this, European Lutherans were but following historical precedent in that Augustine and Luther, though they used the Scripture selectively, yet built towering classical theology.

This contrast between European and Midwest United States Lutheranism is pointed up in the picture

of the young Pastor Gerberding holding up the book *The Faith of the Christian Church* by Gustaf Aulen, a leading Lutheran theologian of Sweden and saying, "How can I be accused of heresy when I but preach as Lutherans teach?" And this question was met by the reported rejoinder of the president of the Northwest Synod, Dr. Bishop, "I am not sure they are Lutherans any more."

Again it must be noted that the Synod of the Northwest (Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas and Montana) is not only the conservative synod, but, in addition, controls also its own seminary, Northwestern Seminary in Minneapolis. This in turn makes that seminary, unlike any other ULC seminary, strictly synodical in personnel and control. Thus in this tightly-knit ecclesiastical family in Minneapolis there has been theological peace until recent times because the synodical officers and the seminary officers and teachers all came from a few families. Between themselves these families ruled the synod with conservative unanimity. Here, as in other Midwest Lutheran groups, the heavy hand of the immigrant fathers shaped and held the pattern dominated by the fundamentalist premise.

But death has a way of bringing new life to birth. Less than a score years ago replacements were necessary on the seminary faculty. Some had pursued advance theological studies in other seminaries. Midwest Lutheranism is plagued by the fact their own schools are not equipped to give the doctorate in theology. These new teachers, and it need only be very few, brought a liberal attitude toward the Bible without succumbing to Protestant liberalism. This is to say they practiced the historical method in studying the Bible without sacrificing orthodoxy in theology. And a few enthusiastic, young theological students such as Crist, Gerberding, and Wrigley became friends of each other in seminary days and friends with the faculty source of their "expulsive power of a new affection."

What has been happening in Milwaukee then illustrates the fact the grip of the immigrant founding fathers is loosening. That classic Christian theology is dependent alone upon the fundamentalist doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible is now not only secretly held suspect but has come out into the open where it ought be. Hence the heresy charges and these trials. To be sure, the immediate occasion for the trials will remain obscure to those of us outside the family of the Northwest Synod. Not only are young

ministers prone to crusade in their youthful idealism, but others are militantly conservative for reasons of ecclesiastical politics. Again, one generation of church officials may not be as astute as those who were formerly in charge of the destinies of the synod. And yet again, there is the leaven within the laity for Biblical scholarship findings and changing theological thinking finally filters through to the laity no matter how skilled in gobbledegook the preacher may be who speaks without saying. Yes, the facets to the precipitation of this unhappy situation must be surmised to be several.

But one general observation seems fairly obvious. Whatever the weather otherwise, it is springtime in Midwestern Lutheranism. The ice is beginning to break, the long cold winter of dark dogmatism which has for a century characterized the diaspora culture of Midwest Lutheranism is beginning to wane.

And yet any hope of a coming new warmth and brightness and light in Lutheranism is here only a slim hope. The final pathos in the Milwaukee heresy trials lies in the terrible silence of the fellow ministers of the accused, not one of whom have publicly spoken out in understanding, appreciation, brotherly defense. As a matter of further question, what other Lutheran churches, yes, other Protestant churches have extended any hand of fellowship, displayed any concern of the heart for these young men with families and with their ministerial careers jeopardized?

According to the constitution of the synod the decisions of guilt and the synodical suspension from the ministry of these three men must be approved by the delegates to the Northwest Synod meeting in Milwaukee next May 15. A lively debate could develop on the floor of the conference. But those "in the know" doubt anything important will come of it. Any independent action of ministers is too professionally precarious in the Northwest Synod and they may also be saved their embarrassment by the action of any board of review which could bottle up any appeal in committee.

This, then, will be the long winter of heart-searching among the ministerial contemporaries of these men who also studied under the same new faculty members at the seminary, who read the same books by Lutheran theologians which books were submitted in vain by the defendants at each trial, fellow ministers who used the same scholarly references and who have in the inner sanctum of their own souls entertained the same thoughts as Crist, Gerberding, and Wrigley.

#### SEASON'S GREETINGS TO OUR FRIENDS AND READERS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your consistently generous support of our journal, and wish you all a joyful Christmas!

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THE EDITORS

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## Editorial Notes

(Continued from page 162)

Communist picture of America as a "war-monger" and replaced it with the amiable countenance of the American President. Beyond these accomplishments the results were nil, and the hopes generated by Geneva proved to be illusory, particularly the hope that the Communist leopard had changed his spots. The leopard was revealed instead to be a much shrewder and more formidable foe than he was in the old Stalinesque garb.

The more formidable character of the Communist strategy may be briefly described. First of all, communism has found a way to bridge what hitherto seemed to be the formidable barrier of the Islamic world. It has surmounted this barrier by the simple expedient of offering the military dictatorship of Egypt military weapons and thus encouraging it to settle its old scores with the new state of Israel. We have been powerless to prevent this step and our only answer to it has been to reluctantly sell Israel arms and to hope that war will not break out in the Middle East. It is a not very robust hope.

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The second great triumph of Communist strategy is revealed in the German problem. It was probably a mistake of the Summit conference to postpone the problem of German reunification to the second conference, when the Communists objected to it on the agenda. For they proved themselves as intransigent at the second Geneva conference as heretofore, and we might have expected that this would be so, for Russia cannot afford to loose East Germany. But she has contrived to take the question out of our control and nothing but the life of a very old man by the name of Adenauer now stands between us and a separate bid from the Russians to the Germans, which will be so attractive as to make Germany's continued adhesion to the West very problematic.

The third triumph of Communist policy since Geneva has occurred in Asia. The visit of Bulganin and the party boss Krushchev to India proved that they do not take the "Geneva spirit" too seriously, for they have engaged in the old vituperation against us. Furthermore the policy in Indonesia and Indo-China of infiltrating into nationalist parties bids fair to secure Communist success in these two countries in the near future. It is not a very hopeful picture. One more ominous note must be added. The French have consistently refused to face realities in their North African empire. Their defeat in Indochina seems to have taught them little. We may therefore expect communism to gain ground in Africa.

Let us hope that the prospect of carrying our burdens for many years to come and of facing a foe who is as ruthless as ever and more formidable than he was before, will not prompt a new mood of hysteria among us. But let us face the fact that the little prospect of better days which we had from the Summit conference was more like a mirage than like an oasis in the desert.

R.N.

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## Author in this Issue

Clarence Kilde is a Congregational minister in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.